



## Horizons: Preparing to Share Your Exchange Experience

Time after time Youth For Understanding staff hears former exchange students say,

“It’s so frustrating! Nobody understands. People ask, ‘What was it like?’ and expect a one sentence answer. How can I explain what I did, what I learned, what it is like to love new parents and brothers and sisters?”

What will you want to share with natural family and friends about your YFU experience? Will your friends at school want to know the same things as your grandmother, younger brother or sister, or the students who are planning to be exchange students? Consider who you will want to share your exchange experience with and prepare something that will appeal to each of them.

### Videos and Slide Shows

Most exchange students take either slides or prints. How can they be put together so you can share them? Here are a few ideas.

If you have taken slides, you have probably taken hundreds! Slides are a wonderful way to share your experience, but showing too many or in poor order can be deadly for your audience. Therefore, keep in mind these two points when you think about your slides: (1) a show that is a chronological dialogue beginning with orientation, leaving, arriving, etc. will probably not be what you want to say, and (2) a slide show of more than 80 slides lasting more than about 20 minutes is likely to put your audience to sleep.

Then what can you do? Here are 6 steps to making some good slide presentations that you can share with various people when you get home.

1. **Decide on one idea or thought that you would like to share.** What themes are important to you: your host family? High school American style? Living in rural America? Similarities and differences between your home country and the USA? Pick **one**.
2. Write a script, or description, about your idea **before** thinking about your slides. Be sure that you write down the important things about the topic you have chosen. For example, if writing a script on your school, you might want to include transportation to school (school buses, private cars, walking), the buildings, required classes, electives, after school activities, the gym and school sports. What else is important or different from your home school: lockers? frequent quizzes and tests?
3. Rewrite your ideas from #2 so that they say what you want to say. Make it interesting, humorous, informative. But keep it short. You should be able to read it slowly in 20 minutes.
4. **Now think about your slides.** Do you presently have slides that will illustrate the ideas in your script? You don’t need one slide for each sentence. One that can focus attention-while you explain a whole paragraph is enough. For example, one good slide of a sporting event would be sufficient while you explain about the importance of sports to your school, what sports are played, the amount of practice teams do, and so on.
5. Make a list of other slides you need to take to prepare a good slide show of not more than 75 slides to accompany your script.
6. Take the additional pictures you need to complete this presentation.

You can repeat these six steps for various themes so that you can give several different slide shows easily when you get home.

You can use many of your slides for more than one show. For example, if you want to do a general slide show on your YFU experience, you could use some slides from a school show, others from a show on your host family, and still others from a series you might do on your community.

In order to have your slides easily identified for each slide show, assign each show a color and mark a part of the top of each slide with that color. Also number the slides with that color. For example, your school slide show might be green, with green numbering on the slides you will use for it. Any one slide may have 3 or 4 colored numbers to indicate its place in various shows.

### Photo Prints

If you have taken your photos with print film, consider arranging them as photo essays showing different aspects of your exchange experience.

As with slides, you should decide what the themes are that you wish to show. First choose a theme, decide what is important to say about it, then select from your prints the ones that illustrate it. You still have time to fill in any gaps by taking a few more photos before you leave.

A typical photo-essay you might consider is one on your host family. The obvious pictures would be ones of your family members. But also consider your family's lifestyle: the house itself (all of the rooms), family recreation in various seasons, family occupations and hobbies, as well as seasonal shots: snow, autumn, bar-b-cues in the backyard, decorations at Christmas time.

Prints are probably best mounted in a scrapbook. If you have the time, write out some explanations and interesting facts to accompany the photos. It will make sharing the essay easier and you won't forget some details you think are important.

You may find that you don't have prints to show some things you wish to share. Ask your family if they might have negatives you could copy, or supplement your own prints with pictures from magazines. You might need to do this especially with a theme like your region of the USA.

### **Objects**

Most students end up with a collection of souvenirs and other items when they get home. Why not think of some that will help you share your experience? Here are some ideas.

1. Sports equipment for a sport you hadn't played before or which isn't played in your home country. Board games that you have learned to play in the USA.
2. Items used to celebrate host country holidays with your natural family and friends - Thanksgiving napkins, horn of plenty; American-style Christmas ornaments, cookie cutters, Christmas cards; decorations for such days as Valentine's Day, New Year's Day, Halloween.
3. Canned, dried or bottled food items to help you prepare a special meal for your natural family or make cookies or candy typically made in your host country.
4. Cassette tapes of American music you like, conversations with friends and host family, recordings of favorite radio conversations. You might take your tape recorder to school and record part of several classes. It might be interesting for your schoolmates at home to hear an algebra or history class in English.
5. Records of musical groups you enjoy as well as perhaps a collection of American patriotic songs or Christmas music.
6. An American cookbook and some of your favorite recipes your host mother cooks.
7. Hobby or handicraft books and materials.
8. An American calendar that explains special American holidays.
9. An American world history, US history or geography book to show how these subjects are taught in the USA.

Items such as those described above can be used to help share a little of what you learned to enjoy in the USA.

### **Skills**

You have probably learned several new skills while you have been an exchange student. Your proficiency in English may be the obvious one, but others like learning how to get along in another culture may not be. There may be skills you have learned that you can share with others when you return home. If you haven't learned some of these listed below, you still have time to pick up a few of them.

1. Learn to cook a few of your favorite host country dishes.
2. Learn some songs and dances that are typical of your host country. If you have younger brothers or sisters or cousins at home, make sure you learn some songs, singing games, and other games that American children their same age play.
3. Learn some American folk tales. Perhaps you can find a good book of folklore to take with you. See if you can find out how the folklore reflects your host culture.
4. Learn a new sport or table game that you can teach your natural family and friends.

### **Gifts**

Just as you brought gifts to your host family, you are probably planning to take gifts home to your natural family and some special friends. While trying to decide what to take, keep in mind that you might be able to take something very American that will help you share your experience. Games, records, puzzles, and maps for brothers and sisters of all ages, an American cookbook or some needlepoint or embroidery work with American scenes might be nice for grandmother or aunts, and so on. Use your imagination and spend some time looking. You may find some creative ways to share your exchange experience with your gifts.

### **Your Expectations**

With all the best preparation of things to take home, have realistic expectations. It will be difficult to really share some parts of your experience because so many things can't be captured in photos or purchased in a store. You will have much more to share than your family or friends will be able to understand. Prepare yourself to be patient with their short attention spans.